Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable With Colonel Christopher Barnett and Major Brian Creel, Recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor, Via Teleconference Subject: Their Award of Distinguished Flying Cross Medals for their Heroic Actions During Two Separate Battles in Afghanistan in 2009 Time: 11:30 a.m. EDT Date: Thursday, May 17, 2012

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, May 17th, 2012. My name is William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and I will be moderating our call today.

Sirs, are you still on the line?

COL./MAJ. : We are.

MR. SELBY: OK. Good. I was just making sure that wasn't you that dropped off. Today, we are honored to have as our guests, Colonel Christopher Barnett and Major Brian Creel who will each be decorated with two Distinguished Flying Cross medals for their heroic actions during two separate battles in Afghanistan in 2009.

A note to everybody on the line, as you all know, please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your questions. Respect the guests' time, keeping your questions succinct and to the point. And please keep your phone on mute if you are not asking a question.

With that, Colonel Barnett and Major Creel, I'm going to open it up to you. If you have an opening statement, you can go ahead with that.

COLONEL CHRISTOPHER BARNETT: This is Colonel Chris Barnett here. I'll go ahead and start.

I just wanted to set a little bit of background for everybody that's on about the -- what the nature of this appointment was, why it was somewhat unique.

Very quickly, the unit that we were in at the time and that I was the commander of was 34th Weapons Squadron based out of Nellis Air Force Base which is part of the U.S. Air Force Weapons School which does really the top-tier Ph.D.-level tactics and instructional training for various Air Force airframes from F-16s, F-15s, F-22s, space, SOF.

And, in our -- in our particular squadron, we trained combat search and rescue and all the facets of that for the HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter. So the unit, which usually -- or has never deployed, but was made up of all senior instructors who had all had a lot of deployment experience was tasked by the chief of staff of the Air Force in, eventually, March 2009 to deploy to Afghanistan to really fill a void of what Secretary Gates at the time saw as not having enough medical evacuation, casualty evacuation assets in Afghanistan so that we could provide that the quickest care for our soldiers, our airmen, our sailors who might be wounded on the battlefield out there in Afghanistan.

So we had deployed out to Afghanistan in March of 2009 with not only the 34th Weapons Squadron which is pilots and aircrew, flight engineers, gunners in the back. Pararescue men who are our combat medics, were from the 38th Rescue Squadron out of Moody Air Force Base were augmenting us. And our maintenance came from the 763rd Maintenance Squadron out of Nellis Air Force Base also which was the squadron that regularly did the maintenance on our helicopters out at Nellis Air Force Base.

One difference in the Air Force as opposed to some of the other services is the fact that, in the Air Force, the maintenance squadrons are separate than the actual -- than what we would call operational squadrons. And, therefore, that's why 763rd Maintenance Squadron was supporting us also.

Plus, we had supporting personnel from the Air Force Weapons School itself, which is intelligence, communications and general operations support.

With that said, I will kick this over to Major Creel who was then Captain Creel who was one of my top instructor pilots at the weapons school at the time. He and I were flying together for both of the events that we're going to talk about today, and I'll let him go ahead and describe what occurred; the first event being on the 4th of April, 2009, which was approximately two weeks after the 34th Weapons Squadron had arrived in theater.

Over to you, Brian.

MAJOR BRIAN CREEL: Thank you, sir.

Brian Creel here. As Colonel Barnett said, the first event, like Colonel Barnett said, was about two weeks after we got into theater. However, I mean, you've got to realize that, once we got into theater, we were -- we were only on the ground at Bastion -- within 12 hours, we were doing the first combat mission.

So even if the first mission was only -- was two weeks after we arrived, we had been doing missions all the way up until that time. And on average, over each 24-hour period, we had two separate work crews doing that with Colonel Barnett and I being on one of those alert crews of two crews apiece.

We were doing two to six combat missions a day. So we were extremely busy the entire time we were there. But on this case, on the 4th of April of 2009, we received notification that an Afghan army soldier had injured himself -- had a pretty serious head injury about 15 miles south of Bastion Airfield where we were stationed there with our helicopters and unit.

The weather was pretty bad that day. As you know, the sandstorm, shamal, had come through Afghanistan and also when we were in Iraq the same thing. They can degrade the visibility very quickly to less than a mile or even worse.

This mission was in the daytime, so that does help. We still had insurgents in the area of where the soldier was injured. So as we kind of worked our way down to the south of Bastion, you know, our main concern was basically the visibility. There were still insurgents in the area, but I guess because we had the bad visibility, we did not get engaged during that time because it was kind of hard for them to see us as well. So that actually helped us in the long run, although it was very challenging at one point not even being able to see the aircraft in front of you or behind you at about a half a mile or so. When we landed to the area where the Afghan soldier was injured, our PJs, pararescue, once they got that soldier in the aircraft, we had to determine where to take the soldier. As we -- as they do their initial look at the -- at everybody -- everybody that gets on our aircraft, we have a process to kind of figure out at what location has the best care.

So we determined that Kandahar, through our PJs and up through medical ops there back at Kandahar, had the best trauma care for the head injury. So we elected to take them -- it's about an hour and a half from that location, maybe an hour and 15 minutes back to Kandahar.

So this is kind of the first part. And I say that because this ended up being about 10 hours of mission totally. So the first part was a pretty challenging rescue and -- (inaudible) -- in itself to go back to Kandahar and drop off the soldier there for care.

And then, at that time, we refueled, and then it was time to head back to Bastion. Well, what we do though -- and particularly in this case, what we did, when we got into theater, we talked to all the commanders of all of the units that we were going to support there, and we were able to get all of their information to be able to listen in on their operations all the time, all their radio frequencies.

In this particular case, we were able to monitor a satellite communications frequency of one of the special forces teams, our Green Beret teams. And on our way back to Bastion, there was a -- there was a SAW (ph) team that had -- that was in an area that they had received

casualties, and they knew that we were on our way back to Bastion and asked us if they could divert over to where they were for what we call airborne alert.

At the time, in that area, we were probably 15 to 20 minutes, maybe a little bit further away, from Bastion, and we asked through our command channels and they granted us permission to give them an escort, basically, through the really contested area they were going through. This whole time, we're kind of burning more gas, helping them get through the area that they're going through with insurgents and, also, obviously, heavily improved explosive-device area that they had already received casualties with.

While we were doing that, we were able to break away from them and get gas one more time. And then this kind of puts us into the next phase of the mission, and this is when another unit -- another Green Beret unit -- came under pretty heavy fire in an area north of Bastion, as well, but only not than many kilometers from where we were escorting the other unit, also. So we were able to move over to their location pretty fast.

The problem, though, was that they were under so much intense fire from different compounds that they were not quite sure which compound the fire was coming from. And there was a B-1 bomber and also coalition Apaches that were already on station to provide them close air support. The B-1 had already dropped several bombs in the area, but where they started taking fire at that point, though, they could not drop in that area based on the possibility of civilian casualties. And the Green Beret unit was under such fire that they just could not get up from under their cover and find out where it was to call in any support.

The same thing with the Apaches -- they were not able to engage, either, based on where they were and the altitude that they were located. When we came in, I had made initial contact with the ground controller there on the ground, who basically controls all of the air access around that unit, and told him that we were inbound and we had .50-cal machine-gun capability with a close-air or close-combat attack support capability that then we could provide support for them. He immediately wanted us to do that and attack a compound that was, we estimate, two to three large-caliber weapons that were shooting at the Green Berets at that time. He couldn't even tell us which compound it was based on -- you know, normally, when we come in there, we follow certain examples and certain radio procedures of, you know, we're at this location. I have this much ammo. I can be on station at this time. And then that individual on the ground comes back and gives me the response to that, and then they can control us how they need to. That pretty much went all out the window because he literally couldn't do anything but just stay on the ground because of the fire that was coming down on him.

So he told us to shoot at the compound that had, he said, a blue door. That was the only thing that he knew of was that the fire was coming from a compound that had a blue door. So at this point, it was kind of challenging because we had to confirm where our friendly forces

were. We had to confirm where the enemy was. And also, we needed to de-conflict any civilians around the area, as well.

Everyone that was in the area in the other airframes couldn't do that because of their altitude, so it was apparent that we had to get low to figure out where all these different outfits were. So we flew over the Green Beret unit, and then also the enemy forces, at about 200 feet. That was the only way that we could see where the fire was coming from and also guarantee that we knew where the friendly forces were and any civilians in the area.

Once we positively identified the friendly forces and the enemy forces, unfortunately, having to go that low, we circled back around. And the forces on the ground cleared us in for an attack. We set up for what we call an L-attack, which is basically a close-combat attack with our .50-cal weapons fixed forward in a dive. And we went in as a flight of two, so shooting four .50-caliber weapons at the same target at the same time.

And it pretty much devastated the compound and ended up killing all the insurgents. We didn't know that at the time. Basically, our main concern was trying to protect the Green Berets, so we didn't have to pick up a casualty. We wanted to prevent that if we could. As I was coming off the target and our wingman was in his attack profile, shooting his weapons, I could see all the Green Berets jump up from their cover. And they basically assaulted this compound from about 200 to 300 meters away -- that's how close they were when they were taking on fire -- because the fire stopped once we started shooting.

As we came off the target, we were engaged by a couple of rocket- propelled grenades, was unable to return fire on that, unfortunately, because as the individual shot, he went back into his house. And then now, we can't shoot because of any other civilian casualty that may happen with that. We didn't receive any battle damage. We did avoid all the rockets. And then we were able to stay for a little bit longer for the Green Berets to go through the compound, confirm that all enemies had been killed or at least driven out of the compound. And then we needed to refuel one more time and then came back and just stayed there until they were ready to bed down and escorted them into the area where they were going to spend the night in their vehicles. Once we knew that they were safe, and then we basically returned back to Bastion. That was pretty quick over what we did that day with different pieces of it, but that all covered about a 10 to 10-and-a-half-hour flying day, so it was pretty long. And obviously, parts of it were pretty busy at that time.

I'm going to turn this -- that was the first mission for the first decoration -- I'm going to turn this back over to Colonel Barnett. And he's going to talk to you about not just one rescue mission but three rescue missions that kind of play into an operation that was in a town called Marja that is part of the second award citation. Sir, go ahead.

COLONEL CHRISTOPHER BARNETT: Thanks, Brian. I'm going to talk just real briefly from the period of time of April 4th, 2009. After that

mission, our crews in the 34th Weapons Squadron out there were -- with our PJs from the 38th -- were probably flying around maybe two to three missions a day at that point for about the next two weeks. At the end of April, as the Taliban finished up the poppy harvest, at that point in time in the season, things really started to heat up.

We had British forces, Green Berets, like Brian said, that were working out there -- Special Forces -- also, Marines in the general area working in Helmand province, which, as the time went on, really, that became our area of main focus was the Helmand River Valley area. And if you may hear me refer to what we called the green zone at that point in time as I'm discussing this, which was the area south of where we were stationed at the Forward Operating Base Bastion along the Helmand River Valley in an area that's called Nad Ali and then, further, a section of that, which was known as Marja, which made the news about nine months later when the Marines went through there and cleaned it out.

From the period, like I said, in April to when the next events occurred for these awards, which was May 19th and 20th of 2009, our crews were flying -- (audio break) -- 10 missions a day, per set of crews. And this was a 12-hours-on, 12-hours-off shift. We only had enough crews at Bastion that we could -- no one had a day off, is the bottom line. So Brian and myself -- the crews we were flying in were noon to midnight. And we came on the next day at noon, and we did that for the entire 80 days that we were out there. Maintainers also working 12-hour shifts -- 12 hours on, 12 hours off.

And they were making sure that these aircraft kept going and what became really a, at the time, an unprecedented operation tempo for these aircraft.

I mean, I think in May, about the third week of May we looked at the stats and we were flying in Helmand, in the Helmand River Valley, we were flying more casualty evacuation missions than the rest of the theatre, the rest of Afghanistan and Iraq combined. Every other asset was flying - combined was flying about the same number of missions that these guys were, so just as a shout-out there, I mean, you could not be more proud of the crews hanging in there, the PJs that were in the back on a daily basis being, you know, not people that were sick or, you know, had minor injuries for the most part but people that were actually, you know, badly wounded, whether from an IED or from, you know, gunshot wounds, et cetera and trying to keep these guys alive.

In fact, to the point where, you know, we were seeing, you know, the pararescue working on guys in the back and my, you know, gunner, a guy by the name of Jason, went by Jazz Parker, holding the IV bag while he's manning, you know, the gun with one hand and holding the IV bag for the PJs with the next hand while my flight engineer, Michael Harkins was, you know, reaching over, making sure, you know, switches were in the right place and also manning a gun out the right side and passing back bandages, et cetera, to these guys, and this is going on in my aircraft, all the other aircraft that were in our flights at the time.

By the time we hit the time frame of the second mission, which was again May 19th, we had built up relationships with the Marines, with the Special Forces guys. Again, the guys that Brian had just talked about, that we supported during that firefight on the 4th of April and also the British, who were really out there working very closely also with the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.

On May 18th, a operation commenced in what is, again, called the Marja area of Afghanistan, and if I could I'll just -- I'll read from the statement that the ground force commander made that shows this is what they were looking at as they went in there. This operation that they were conducting, again in Marja - now, just as quick background, this is an entirely Taliban-controlled area of the Helmand River Valley, to the point where during at least our deployment there and I don't think any time really since about 2005, we had seriously sent any troops of any coalition nature. The Brits didn't go in there, the SF guys really didn't go in there. Nobody went into this area.

It was a known Taliban area. We basically were trying to keep them bottled up in that area and not let them out, but we couldn't go in and force them out either. We just didn't have the troop presence at the time. So with that being said, the decision was made to go in there and really shake things up for these guys, and here's what the ground force, the Special Forces commander said. He said that the operation they were going to conduct, which was again, it started on May 18th, was considered an extremely high-threat operation consisting of a nighttime air assault into what many described as a safe haven of Taliban-controlled territory. The target objective was the Loy Turup (ph) bazaar in Marja, so in other words, it was a market where known Taliban -- this market was the known Taliban seat for their government. It was their logistic house, their medical treatment center, the Taliban meeting and planning center and, most importantly, it was their narcotic nexus.

The intelligence led these guys to believe that due to the timing of the operation post, the harvest, that the Taliban command in control knows in Marja has completed the taxation of all the farmers and the lower level Taliban war lords out there and had brought all, basically, the taxation of the opium, of the poppies into this market area and they were set up there, then, as basically their logistics hub from which to farm the drugs out to whoever was purchasing these, you know, to keep financing the insurgency.

They figured that they were not going to only find a great deal of drugs but large amounts of military equipment and improvised explosive device materials, which they all did find, as it turns out.

They figured that they were putting themselves in a situation that at the daylight of the first day because, remember, they were going in at night on March 18th (sic). At daylight of the first day they would be effectively surrounded by enemy forces with small arms, large caliber weapon systems, indirect fire systems; in other words, mortars and rockets, and a motivation to protect what they themselves, the Taliban, described as the new Taliban capital of the Helmand Province.

So that's the situation as it was when this Special Forces company went into this bazaar area on the night of March 18th (sic). Obviously when the Taliban started to wake up on March 19th (sic) and realized that their, you know, that their narcotic nexus has been grabbed -- yes? Oh, I'm sorry, May -- May. Thank you. I said March, it's actually May -- May 18th they went in and then this was May 19th that the first mission that we conducted occurred.

And, essentially, through that morning as the Taliban became aware that the Special Forces guys had gone in and taken over their drug safe haven, they started gathering forces and attacking the compound, and as the day went on, the attacks got more and more severe as, you know, the first wave wasn't able to dislodge the Special Forces guys, so they went, got on their cellphones, called around to all their other buddies down there and then started bringing them in, so every about hour and a half, hour or so, you'd have this new wave of attacks on these Special Forces positions.

In the afternoon of May 19th our crews had flown, I think, already three missions that day when we got the call that one of the Special Forces soldiers had been wounded. And we were in our operations center back at base at this time and what we were doing was essentially listening in on their satellite communications, on their radio system to hear if anything went wrong, so we knew - both Brian Creel, Captain Kirk Adams, who was the aircraft commander of the other aircraft, and myself - we all knew these individuals that were down there.

We knew the commander personally, could hear his voice on the radio as each of these attacks started, and when we heard first that the comment that we heard on the radio was nine line coming in and what that means to us is a nine line is basically a radio format whereby you transmit that you've had a casualty and it's the first three lines that nine line, which is that you've had a casualty, what call sign that person is, that number two is where they're -- what location they're at, and number three is that -- what category, really, of casualty. And in this case we had, you know, a severe, what you would call urgent/critical surgery, so someone that has been hit, wounded, and we knew we needed to get out of there and back to base.

We immediately started pushing to the aircraft, got in the aircraft as the kind of standard controlling agencies were still working through the fact that, you know, that a casualty had occurred because we had this kind of a heads-up by listening into their radio frequency, so we were able to get off the ground within about five minutes of the first casualty occurring. As we pressed down towards that area, you could hear over the radios, and we were now talking on about two different, three different radios, to guys that were down in the objective area, and you could hear the gunfire over the radios, you know, on each of the radio frequencies that we were listening to on our way down.

Brian Creel was talking to the commander of the ground forces, the SF commander at the time, and the SF commander initially came over the radio and said, hey, you guys cannot come in here yet. The area's too hot, we're taking too much fire from heavy machine guns, AK-47s and

rocket-propelled grenades. I'd like you guys to hold off for about 10 minutes, and the casualty is actually on the rooftop. We need to get him off the rooftop before you guys come in because it's too dangerous.

Brian Creel came over the radio and told him, hey, understand your concerns.

We won't try to get them off the rooftop, but we are going to come in and we'll just stack high. If we can provide any supporting fires for you, we will. But we want to be as close as possible when we're able to get in and get this guy out. The individual had a very severe wound to his arm -- severed arteries, severed tendons -- you know, so we're in real danger if losing this guy or losing his arm, you know, at this point in time.

As we pressed in, fortunately, they were able to get this individual off the roof down to an area near the outside of the compound that they were located in. We came into the area. What we do -- sent one aircraft -- and I said my wingman at this point in time with Captain Kirk Adams (sp) -- sent his aircraft into the landing zone. They went into get the wounded soldier, while at the same time our aircraft that Brian and I were in, we did some basically diving gun passes trying to locate insurgents if we could find them, trying to keep their heads down, doing whatever we could to cover that aircraft that was going into the zone, to draw fire.

The firing was so intense it -- I mean, the building right next to where the aircraft landed you could see the rounds coming off and see the dust kicking up from where the heave machine-gun rounds were impacting the building. As we were able to get that individual, got him out of there, got him back to the hospital -- really, without anyone taking any rounds at the time, which was pretty much a miracle.

Talking to the commander of the Special Forces team, after we got back from this entire operation being over, he made the comment that that casualty evacuation had turned the tide, really, for his troops down there, because they really -- they expected us to come down, but until we actually down there in that firefight during the day, you know, it really lifted the spirits of the guys. They knew that if somebody got hit, that we would get them out of there and that in itself, you know, made the guys fight harder knowing that we had their backs.

MR. SELBY: Roger.

COL. BARNETT: They also --

MR. SELBY: Oh, I'm sorry, sir.

COL. BARNETT: That's OK. No worries. They also said it worked out for them, because as soon as we showed up on scene, all of the insurgents stopped firing at their positions and started firing at the two helicopters. So that game them at least a little bit of a breather for the couple minutes that we were down there.

That evening, we were notified of a second casualty where an individual was wounded in the abdomen -- took a round. It was a dark night, black night, no moon illumination. I should probably point out that at the first mention --

MR. SELBY: Sir?

COL. BARNETT: Yes?

MR. SELBY: I apologize. I'm going to jump in, because I think a few of the bloggers are dropping off. And I wanted to make sure -- how much time did you guys have for the roundtable, because I think -- I want to make sure that I get -- I am able to get some of the bloggers questions in as well. And I'm not trying to cut you off there.

COL. BARNETT: I can -- I'll wrap this up very quickly.

MR. SELBY: Roger that, sir. Sorry.

COL. BARNETT: OK. That is not a problem.

Here's the bottom line: We went there that night. We went in there the next day, also, for the third time. By the time we went in there on the third day -- or excuse me, on the second day, but the third mission -- the battle was so intense. I have guys that were in my helicopter that were in Operation Anaconda, that were -- like Brian Creel's got another distinguished flying cross for a mission he did in Iraq in 2004 where he had five missiles shot at him. And all these guys could not believe the amount of fire that they were taking.

So all three individuals, critical casualties. Got them all back, they all lived with no really untoward effect, because we were able to get them to a hospital so quickly and they were all returned to active duty at some future date once we got them back to the states and got them fully patched up.

I'll kick it over to questions from you guys and from whoever's left on line there.

MR. SELBY: Thank you so much, sir.

All right. Let's see -- Chuck, are you still there?

Q: Yeah, I'm still here.

MR. SELBY: Go ahead. Q: Thank you for all the good info, gentlemen.

The second incident -- the night operation -- how many total casualties did you guys evacuate?

COL. BARNETT: It was one that night. It was a total of three over two days.

Q: OK. And just very quickly: The first incident took place where?

MAJ. CREEL: That was -- that was -- man, that was around Kajaki Dam, north of Bastion Forward Operating Base and on the north side of the Helmand River Valley.

Q: Up near the dam?

MAJ. CREEL: Yes, ma'am. It was west of the dam about -- if you're familiar with it, about 10 miles.

Q: OK. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: And Dale, are you still there? I think Dale may have dropped off.

Sagar?

Q: Yeah. Good morning, gentlemen.

Can you give me a little bit more of a reaction of what your friends and family think of what you do and the event that you guys were involved with?

COL. BARNETT: I would say -- this is Colonel Chris Barnett, because I won't speak for Brian, obviously, on this one.

I will say that at the time it was going on, you really don't have the opportunity to communicate back with what is going on. I think when you talk about it now I would say that I think that they're proud of the fact of what we do -- you know, what in general the Air Force rescue does out that. It's fortunate, because it's a -- you know, it's a very noble calling for your job to be to go out and get people out of harm's way.

So go ahead, Brian.

MAJ. CREEL: Yeah. I would certainly agree with Colonel Barnett. I mean, you don't call back home every time you do something like this and talk to your wife or your family or whatever. You know, they're -- you know, you've got to remember that, you know, my wife Angela, she's my hero. You know, what she does back here when we're doing this stuff, it's just -- it's unbelievable. She holds the family together and keeps the house going. And when I come back, we talk about it and you know, obviously, she's proud.

And not just, you know, what we do on certain times, but just what the whole Air Force combat rescue community does. But I mean, we cannot forget what our spouses for both the men and the women who are deployed, you know, what they do back here. Because, I mean, frankly, we couldn't do it if they were not doing what they were doing here.

COL. BARNETT: Yeah, I'll just add on -- the is Chris Barnett here -- you know, it's hard on them. There's no doubt about it. It's hard, though, for all of them that have people deployed overseas that, you know, despite whatever level of danger -- you know, personal danger they're in -- it's hard on the spouses. And I certainly don't envy them that.

MR. SELBY: Did you get that, Sagar?

Q: I did. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

MR. SELBY: You're welcome.

Michelle, are you still on the line?

Q: I am.

MR. SELBY: OK.

Q: I want to thank both of the gentlemen for their service and everything of what they do for us, being here right at Scott Air Force Base myself. It makes a big difference in totaling understanding what our Air Force men do.

I'm curious still if either of them on these missions, in this particular one, were these multiple deployments for you previously that you had to endure to come up upon this particular deployment?

COL. BARNETT: Yes. I guess, is the easy answer.

The thing about all the guys that were at the weapons school -- that were at the 34th Weapons School -- all senior instructors, all -- everyone there had done multiple deployments already to Afghanistan and/or Iraq.

Q: I know we lost two of our airmen here in missions immediately following those you're speaking of. And I know at that point in time it was very difficult. And that's why I didn't know -- was curious how you all were handling the return in such a short amount of time with so many casualties.

COL. BARNETT: This is Chris Barnett; I'll let Brian answer. I'll tell you, it's hard. There was no doubt about it than when we got back in 2009, I turned over the squadron about 30 days after we got back.

So I came back from the deployment. We got back the second week of June. I did my change of command. I went off to the Air War College immediately after there. And the change in the tempo of my life was absolutely extreme.

And this is, for me -- and I'm the guy sitting up front and I'm not seeing the stuff that the guys in the back are seeing on as regular a basis. And I can tell you that it was even harder for -- it's hard for these guys to be in the back doing their job with people that

unfortunately -- and these two -- or, fortunately in these two situations, you know, we didn't lose anybody. Unfortunately, throughout the deployment, we did lose people.

And it's not something that you wish on anyone to have to do. And the comment that I made earlier was not one to be overly dramatic about the guys in the back, like, you know, a gunner who is, you know, supposed to be manning the gun and he is actually, you know, manning the gun with one hand, trying to look outside to look for bad guys while at the same time, you know, he's holding the ID bags, et cetera, while they're trying to, you know, bandage guys up.

I mean, we've had some horrific casualties in the back of these helicopters -- Air Force, Army, Marine, Navy -- everybody that does this line of work, and it's tough on the people. It's tough from -- you go from the adrenaline of stepping out the door -- every time a radio crackles, you jump up and you're out and you're going into a fire fight in five minutes, to coming back here and sitting around a -- you know, Air War College was great, don't get me wrong, but it's not the same, and it's tough to deal with, honestly.

Q: Well, I commend you both and all of your fellow comrades, because you all have done a tremendous job, in the stories we've heard in the aftermath, that no one will tell us any different. You all deserve all the hooahs and shout-outs that you can get, and wholeheartedly you're well-deserving of these awards.

COL. BARNETT: Thank you. I know --

MAJ. CREEL: Thank you.

COL. BARNETT: Brian says thanks.

Did you have anything you wanted to add, then? MAJ. CREEL: Yeah. Actually, you know, the whole thing about losing people is -- you know, in our business you don't have to lose anyone in your unit. If we go out and we lose anyone -- you know, it doesn't have to be an airman. We don't just rescue airmen. It could be a Marine, it could be a sailor, it could be an airman, it could be a soldier.

I mean, if one of those -- if one of those people dies while we're trying to get them back to the hospital, we take that pretty seriously. And that's personal. That affects you more than you actually even realize at the time. And it does, and it's a building thing that builds on itself and you don't even realize it.

So, you know, you've got that piece and then you've got the other piece, you know, coming back -- you know, trying to get to know your wife again. You know, we were gone for four or five months on this one. About four months after this, I left again and came back 19 months later. And, you know, that was not for a flying assignment; that was for a ground assignment in Afghanistan.

But, you know, you've got people in Afghanistan right now, combat search and rescue crews. They're on alert right now. And since 9/11, they have been doing it over and over and over, just like the entire joint world.

So, you know, it's personal and you've got to -- you've got to get over it. And sometimes you don't even realize that you need to get over it. It takes some time.

Q: Yes, it does. And those of us on the home front doing our very best to make sure we can help you all with your resiliency and follow up for resources and all mental, emotional -- because it does have an impact on you, I'm certain, as well as all of your family members. So, we'll do our best on this end to help you all.

COL. BARNETT: We appreciate --

MAJ. CREEL: Thank you.

COL. BARNETT: We do appreciate what you do. I do remember when we were out there. There was an EOD kid that -- EOD airman that we lost that we ended up picking up who was -- he was working with the Brits at the time. I don't know if that was one of yours, if it seems to ring a bell.

Q: Well, we lost the one that was in the German attack -- the bus in German -- and then we lost two of our JTACs here in the following January. So they were back to back on the Air Force here.

MR. SELBY: And let's go right back around. Chuck, did you have another question?

Q: Yes, I did. Gentlemen, despite the fact that you all were senior instructors with multiple deployments, were there any lessons learned from your -- from that first deployment from the school -- well, lessons learned that you can talk about?

COL. BARNETT: I would put out that the number-one thing that we learned on this deployment, because we were doing casualty evacuation -- this is again Colonel Chris Barnett -- is that to do casualty evacuation, the number-one most important thing is how fast you get that soldier, that airman, the Marine, the sailor off the battlefield and onto an operating table, period. Nothing else matters.

I've talked to multiple trauma surgeons since this and they've all agreed that that is what you have to do. And by being able to focus on that as the problem when we got out there -- these guys at the -- these guys were able to cut the time that it took for us to get off from what was a 20-minute average to launch down to under a seven- minute average launch time.

And they were getting every single guy that we got off the battlefield back into the hospital within an hour. And that had not been done before these guys showed up. But the reason that was able to get

down to size, the fact that they were, you know, great individuals, that the maintainers kept these aircraft flying when they were, you know, going into dock and being rode hard -- because I'll tell you straight up that we were -- we were burning out engines because we were not flying them within parameters because we had to get injured guys back to the hospital. And the maintainers were keeping them running, et cetera.

And besides all that, they had to focus on, we've got to get this guy back quick and keep it going. And that's the number-one thing that was learned.

Q: The one hour that you mentioned, was that one hour from notification or one hour from pick-up?

COL. BARNETT: One hour from notification. And that was -- actually, I'll take that back, one hour from injury, because one thing we had done was by creating these relationships with the Brits that were working in Helmand and special forces guys and the Marines, they would contact us directly to let us know. We still run through all the normal processes as we were pushing, but we knew as quickly as possible after the guy got injured. It came straight to us in our operations center.

Q: OK.

And, Major Creel, were there any lessons learned, from your perspective? MAJ. CREEL: I think just -- we had an intel -- an intel officer from the weapons school, an instructor from the weapons school at the time, Captain Adaway (ph). And he really -- he really helped us on the tactical side looking at the thread and how we were flying. And we made a few changes on how we flew the tactics things like that. And I'm pretty sure they're still used today -- not to get into a whole lot of details with it but that made a big difference as well.

But I totally agree with -- at the more operational level, with Colonel Barnett. The most important thing was the speed of getting to that location, and specifically at the point where that really happened as fast as possible, and then getting that person back to the hospital. That was the number-one thing.

COL. BARNETT: And I would say that -- to piggyback on -- this is Chris Barnett -- Chandler Adaway (ph), our intel guy, he was one of the driving forces in getting this thing so that we could trim this time off, creating a system, the control systems, and finessing those. If I could -- if they would let me, I would give him my Bronze Star instead of picking it up tomorrow, because he deserves it.

MR. SELBY: Wow.

OK, well, next, Sagar, did you have follow-up?

Q: I did. I know we're a little quick on time here, but I just wanted to know -- you've mentioned several times that you guys have had to work with so many different agencies, be it the coalition forces, the Green Berets, JTACs, other aircraft.

Tell me about some of the challenges that that faces and how you overcome them in order to get the mission done. And for the record, my local base is the 129th out here at Moffett, so I appreciate all that you guys do, too.

Thanks.

MAJ. CREEL: Go ahead.

COL. BARNETT: All right -- Chris Barnett here. I think that the number-one thing that you do to get around the -- any differences there are, et cetera, is you create kind of what we like to call lateral command relationships. Instead of just, OK, the guy I work for, we made sure that I knew the commanders of all those other units that were going to be operating out in Helmand province. And my guys knew all the people that were operating out there. The maintainers worked with maintainers from other outfits.

And creating those relationships goes -- that's the number-one thing that allowed you to get around any kind of systemic, what you would call, different tactics or different procedures for doing things or how you work together, because when two guys sit down together, who -- like Brian Creel did, he'd sit down with the special forces guys and talk to them about how we do things, how they do things; and within an hour, you've got it ironed out so that when they're talking on the radio to each other, they know what to expect from each other.

And by just going out and creating that -- talking to those guys, creating those relationships -- that's what's going to solve those problems.

That answer your question?

Q: Yes, it did. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: And do you have time for one more question, gentlemen? MAJ./COL. : Yeah, I think we have a few more minutes, so maybe one more.

MR. SELBY: OK.

Michelle?

Q: I -- real briefly -- you had mentioned the control systems, who you said was the driving -- the gentleman -- you said his name was -- what was his name?

COL. BARNETT: Atwood -- Chandler Atwood, A-T-W-O-O-D, first name was Chandler, goes by call sign Fulcrum, like a lever.

Q: (Chuckles.) OK.

The -- my only follow-up question is, when you mentioned the Brits and the working -- interagency working together, it is one team, one fight for all of the branches when you get into areas and operations such as these. Were they as amenable, or are they as amendable, to that creed, if you will, of the -- open to sharing in the interagency?

MAJ. CREEL: Absolutely. When we would go to different units and talk to the commanders and talk to their operators, you know -- I mean, we push -- we push our crews. And we push the aircraft, too, just like Colonel Barnett had mentioned, you know, because we've got to figure out how to do this. You know, it's -- you can't just say, well, the -- you know, the weather is not as nice as I would like it to be or, you know, there are still people that are, you know, still shooting. You've got to figure out how to do what you need to do to get people off the battlefield.

But, you know, even though we push our folks and we push our equipment, you know, when you're flying in to pick up someone that's wounded, when the ground force commander and the rescue pilot recognizes each other's voice on the radio -- I mean, that's a relationship. So absolutely -- as soon as you start working together -- and that's the key, is you work together and you figure out how to do things together by mutually helping each other -- then you have systems that change for the better, not necessarily staying the way they are and may not be so efficient. You change how -- you change the game itself, and you change it for the better.

But it's going to start with relationships to build that on. I mean, when we would come back from a -- when we would come back from a mission, you know, the maintainers from the 763rd at Nellis -- you know, when we first got there, they were maintaining, and we were flying. By the time we left, we would come back, and they would want to know what we did on each mission, because we were now working as a complete team to accomplish the mission. And once we told them what we did, that fired them up even more to work longer and to do whatever it took to try to get those aircraft back again to be ready to go for the next mission, whether that was in a few minutes or maybe, you know, later on that day.

So it's a team and relationship, that's it.

MR. SELBY: Roger that. And I think that that just about does it with the time we have. I'd like to thank everybody for your participation today and thank you guys for your questions and comments.

If you have any closing comments, gentlemen, at this time the floor is yours.

COL. BARNETT: Go ahead.

MAJ. CREEL: I don't -- I -- the only thing I'd have to say is that, you know -- and I think I may have already said it -- we can't -- you know, the awards here are great. We don't do what we do for awards. We do what we do to help people. And you know, right now, there's people

on alert at the same locations, ready to do it again. And if the call comes down, they're going to do the same thing.

COL. BARNETT: And -- it's Chris Barnett here -- I'll just agree with everything that Brian Creel just said absolutely and not repeat that, but will add -- just from my perspective as the commander out there at the time and seeing the guys work, our maintainers that kept those aircraft flying, everyone working a 12-hour day and then going off alert and then coming back 12 hours later, getting zero rest, not one person complained once about the tempo out there. And it just was -- it was an amazing thing to be a part of at the time. And it's not -- I mean, getting this award here tomorrow -- it's really not about me; it's not about us. It's about all those guys that were behind us and kept those aircraft flying and saved those lives, every single one of them.

Q: You wear your uniforms well, gentlemen. There's no "I" in the word "team." I commend you wholeheartedly and thank you profusely for that.

MR. SELBY: As do we all. I'm sure we all share those sentiments. Thank you again for your service. Thank you, everybody, for your time. That concludes today's program. Feel free to disconnect at this time.

COL./MAJ. : Thank you.

MR. SELBY: Thank you.

END.